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Experience design at Starbucks: from global brand management to local spatial experiences

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This study explores the question: Within the context of global brands management and the need for integrating local identities, how does Starbucks achieve global consistency and meaningfully localised experiences? Through a review of literature and a series of interviews with store designers, design managers and brand concept experts at Starbucks, we compiled the most commonly applied branding and design methods, with an emphasis on the locally relevant spatial experiences the global brand delivers. Moreover, we set out to classify our findings in a way that can assist other brand and experience design teams in overcoming shared challenges. Our findings focus on the management of the grounding brand concept, as well as operations and real estate teams. Through presenting some tools, manuals, guidelines and sample checklists, we suggest that store design teams in different locations can build strong, locally relevant spatial experiences that tie in successfully with the brand's global principles.

Keywords: Starbucks, spatial experience design, local identities integration

From Global Brand Management to Spatial Experience Design: an introduction to the research space and the impetus for our interest

Among the principal challenges that globalisation presents for global brands, including Starbucks, is the need to create experiences and to localise these experiences to various markets (Hands, 2008; Holt et al., 2004; Eldemenery, 2009; Boutros, 2009). There is increasing pressure from consumers to eliminate the unrelatable one-size-fits-all model. Therefore, successful global brands need to create a balance between sending a coherent message, while still tailoring it to different cultural local customs (Hands, 2008; Holt et al, 2004; Eldemenery, 2009; Boutros, 2009). He and Wang (2017) clarify that global brands will occasionally err on the side of inconsistency in order to better suit a particular locale.

Aligned organisations work across all functional boundaries as Kalback (2016) suggests, and they have to do whatever it takes to ensure their constituents have a great experience. This need propels the formation of multidisciplinary teams specialised in experience design.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) started a boom by introducing the experience economy, founded on the core distinction between tangible goods and memorable experiences. Kalback's (2016) multidisciplinary view and Pine and Gilmore's experience economy study lead to the use of the term 'spatial experience design' to refer to a holistic view of spaces. This usage moves away from seeing the visitors of such spaces as simply seeking out aesthetic rewards, and instead considers them as complex, emotional beings. In this view, places exist not



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only physically in space, but also in people's minds, memories and imaginations. The identity of a specific space becomes interesting when it recalls a certain experience or evokes associated memories. In those instances, localisation becomes a major factor in fostering positive emotions within branded spaces.

Dealing with all touchpoints and teams with different disciplines in order to accomplish an effective localised spatial experience design has become an undeniably perplexing task. For designers to deliver, competitive organisations rely on multidisciplinary teams, including interior and graphic designers, marketers, and other professionals, so as to achieve the organisation's goals and aims. Designers may comprehend, shape and communicate new, innovative products and visualise brands, but design always needs to be harmonised and carefully associated with a firm's approach and core capabilities, as Hands (2008) has emphasised; this describes the manager's job to a tee. According to Steers et al. (2012), the better the toolkit, the better the chance of success.

On the basis of these core concepts, we look into a global leading brand – Starbucks – to uncover how it confronts the plethora of issues related to localised spatial experiences.

Why Starbucks?

The company selected for the study was Starbucks, a leading global brand with thousands of branches around the world. Its adaptations are successful and include a large number of employees, which made recruiting possibilities more abundant. Several factors supported the choice of Starbucks, including Grinyer's (2001) classifications, as well as Teufel and Zimmermann's (2015) overview of holistic retail experiences, as outlined below.

Starbucks has been identified as a dominant global brand that seeks a balance between consistency and local meaning; therefore, it has occasionally identified the need for its methodology to change, as our research indicates below. Starbucks is a noteworthy example of a brand that typically adapts its spaces in order to suit local environments. *Khaleeji Times*, a newspaper published in the United Arab Emirates, published an article in 2010 entitled 'Global brands, local tastes' (Khaleeji Times, 2010), which suggested that brands such as Starbucks are too standardised.

Our interest for the present research is based on the observation that Starbucks seemed to be picking up on consumers' preference for localised experiences, and dissatisfaction with its standardised shops. In 2012, two years after the article was published in *Khaleeji Times*, the company opened Starbucks 'The Bank' (designed by Liz Muller) in Amsterdam. The corporate website (Starbucks, 2012) suggested that this shop was 'a glimpse of Starbucks's vision for the future'. The design of the shop was highly individualised, revealing a radical aesthetic departure from the usual standardised Starbucks stores. The strategy seems to have been successful, as Starbucks has since designed localised shops for most of its locations.

Furthermore, Grinyer (2001) concludes that brands tend to be either 'value exporters' or 'value collectors', explaining that value exporters have a strong identity and change only minimally from one country to another, whereas value collectors put a tremendous amount of energy into adapting to the different countries in which they establish themselves. Of course, value exporters still have to adapt content to local cultures; however, value collectors have an outward style that is less identifiable from one country to the next, despite the considerable strength of their internal culture.

As we were interested in how global brands adapt to local environments in terms of experiential spatial design, a study of value collector brands would be more beneficial and provide better insights into how global brands have successfully adapted. As Grinyer mentions, even value exporters must adapt slightly; however, collectors such as those often do so drastically. Through the literature and review of images of different Starbucks stores around the world, we established that Starbucks does adapt its stores to their surrounding local environments.

Moreover, among the brands that Teufel and Zimmermann (2015) mention in the book *Holistic Retail Design*, Starbucks stands out as both a value exporter and successful in experiential design. Teufel and Zimmermann include Starbucks specifically because it provides both a holistic retail experience and adapts to local tastes. He references *The New York Times* (2010), stating: 'When Starbucks stock began dropping in 2007, the cookie-cutter approach to store design had fallen out of fashion. In 2008 Starbucks announced it would renovate company-owned stores to be more sustainable and to look less global and more local'.

The emphasis on adapting is also evident on the brand's website, which mentions the importance of local adaptation in store design strategies. This shows that companies put both experiential design and adaptation at the centre of their brand strategies. The Starbucks website (2018) states: 'Our new approach to store design means that our designers are looking at each store individually to ensure that it looks distinctively local. This represents a new level of coffeehouse comfort, meaning that no two Starbucks will ever be entirely the same'.

Starbucks is an interesting case because it was once a value exporter and has more recently changed its strategy. However, Starbucks still does have some standardised new stores, as some of its new designs are more adaptable than others. The method for this study was geared towards understanding Starbucks's strategy in terms of how it selects stores to be localised, as well as how it strikes the right balance between achieving consistency as a global brand and appropriately adapting to different markets.

Through this examination of Starbucks, we set out to understand the strategy used to strike the harmony between consistency and surprise that the branding teams use to convey corresponding experiences.

In order to capture the methods successfully used to tackle such issues, we reviewed secondary sources and developed an empirical study in order to describe the brand strategy. This essential information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with individuals who hold different positions within the Starbucks store design team, so as to comprehend its group structure and how it propels the progress from global to local when planning for spatial experiences.

Research Question and Methodology

In this study, we asked the following question: Within the context of globalisation and the need to reflect local brand identities, how does Starbucks manage the brand in order to achieve global consistency and meaningfully localised experiences?

The first objective was to understand how Starbucks is represented in local spaces. The second was to examine contemporary developments in brand management and experience design and to explore in detail their interrelations.

Therefore, to address the research question and objectives, we first conducted a literature review in order to understand Starbucks's operating context and study how the brand is seen through the lens of external observers. Specifically, we examined empirical data related to the company's spatial experience design methods. Through this approach, we were able to illustrate the successful methods employed by the organisation.

Yin (2014) defines case study research as a technique that explores an existing phenomenon in detail and within its real-world context. This paper used a single case, whereby the attention is focused on the multilayered nature of a single case, so as to comprehend the method used within these specific conditions (Stake, 1995). Flyvbjerg (2013) promotes the single case approach as a method for exploring a phenomenon, suggesting that it can deliver a precise comprehension of the phenomenon's causes and results, and a solid understanding of the qualities of the unique situation at hand, so as to encourage new theories and generate novel research questions.

Literature Review – Starbucks's Operating Context

The following section lays the foundation for the questions posed to the interviewees, including examples of Starbucks's spatial experiences that have been localised, the prior establishment of the importance of teams, as well as the origins of the development of the team responsible for the spatial experience design translating process.

It examines images of Starbucks spaces as well as the company's explanation of those spaces through their archive on 'Pinterest' patterns, showing how its adaptations emerged. Some approaches took their inspiration from surrounding history and heritage, while others included working with local artists or designers, incorporating surrounding landmarks and local customs, and sourcing local materials.

- Geographical inspiration: This approach takes its inspiration from the store's surroundings, be they natural wonders or manmade structures — anything around the area can serve as inspiration. A Starbucks store in Santa Cruz, Bolivia drew inspiration from one of the country's most spectacular

natural wonders, the world's largest salt flat. The geometrical patterns formed by the salt flat inspired many decorative elements found throughout the store (Pinterest, 2018) (Figure 1).

- Local heritage: Starbucks is committed to preserving the environment and showcasing local heritage. For example, its store in Hanoi, Vietnam, has several walls featuring work made by local artists, including a woven bamboo piece, which was made using the same technique as that used to produce Vietnam's iconic conical hats (Pinterest, 2018) (Figure 2). Also, the Starbucks in Fuzhou, China is all about "Wei Qi," the ancient Chinese board game. It houses the famous, world class, first "Wei Qi" master museum (Pinterest, 2019)(Figure 5). Moreover, the design of the remodelled Starbucks store near the bustling Kadikoy Carsi ferry terminal in Istanbul took its inspiration from the aesthetic boats and ferry buildings (Pinterest, 2019) (Figure 6).
- Sourcing local materials: Starbucks also locally sources materials in many of the stores around the world. An article published on its website explains that the decision to locally source is not driven solely by economic factors, but is instead motivated by a desire to be 'respectful' to the country (Starbucks, 2018). Examples include the store next to the flower market in Amsterdam, as mentioned above, which uses local materials including Belgian bluestone, classic white tiles, green marble, and a concrete floor (Figure 3). Also, Panama's store features tilework resembling a hand-painted style germane to the local culture. Starbucks also incorporated design elements from neighbouring regions, including furniture from Colombia and wood slatted light fixtures from Brazil (Starbucks, 2015) (Starbucks, 2015) (Figure 6). Finally, the Starbucks store at Taipei's Longmen building in Taiwan includes Taiwanese-designed wood tables and chairs to create indoor seating that reflects local styles (Starbucks, 2015) (Figure 7).

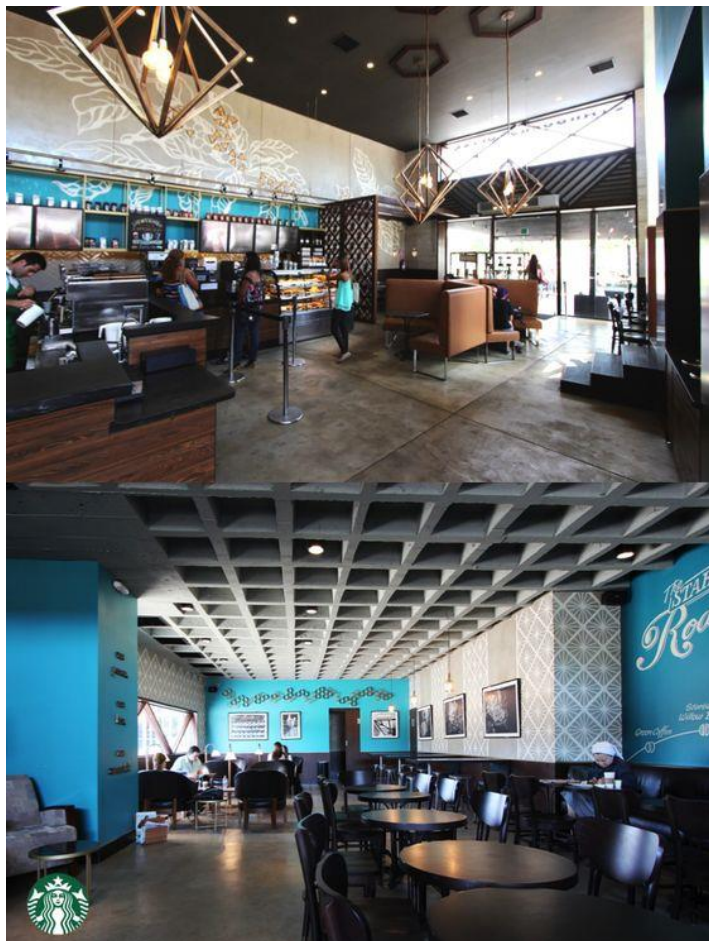


Figure 1: Starbucks Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Source: Pinterest (2018)

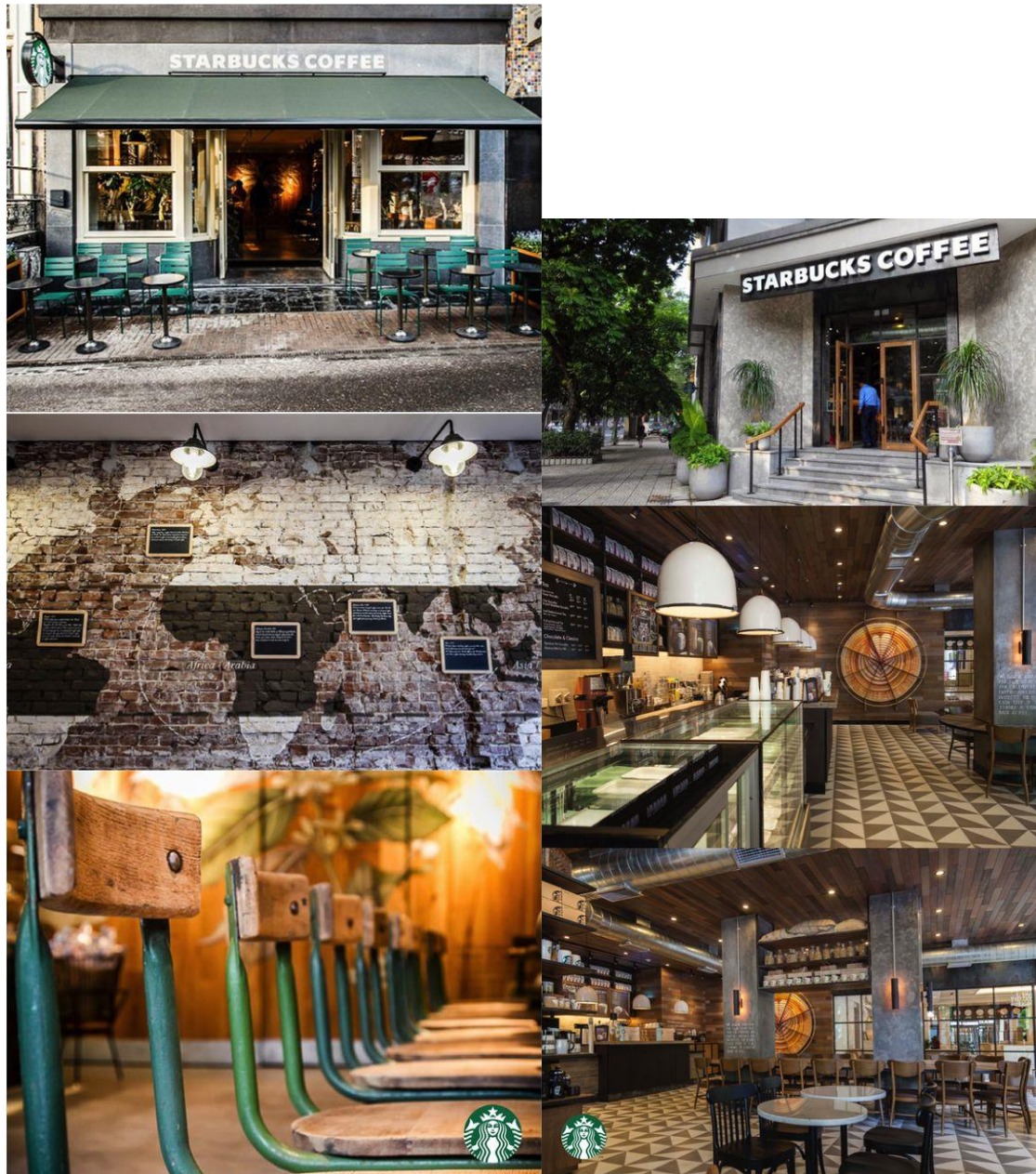


Figure 2: Starbucks Hanoi, Vietnam. Source: Pinterest (2018) & Figure 3: Starbucks Flower Market, Amsterdam. Source: Pinterest (2018)



Figure 4: Starbucks Istanbul, Turkey. Source: Pinterest (2018) & Figure 5: Starbucks Fuzhou, China. Source: Pinterest (2018)

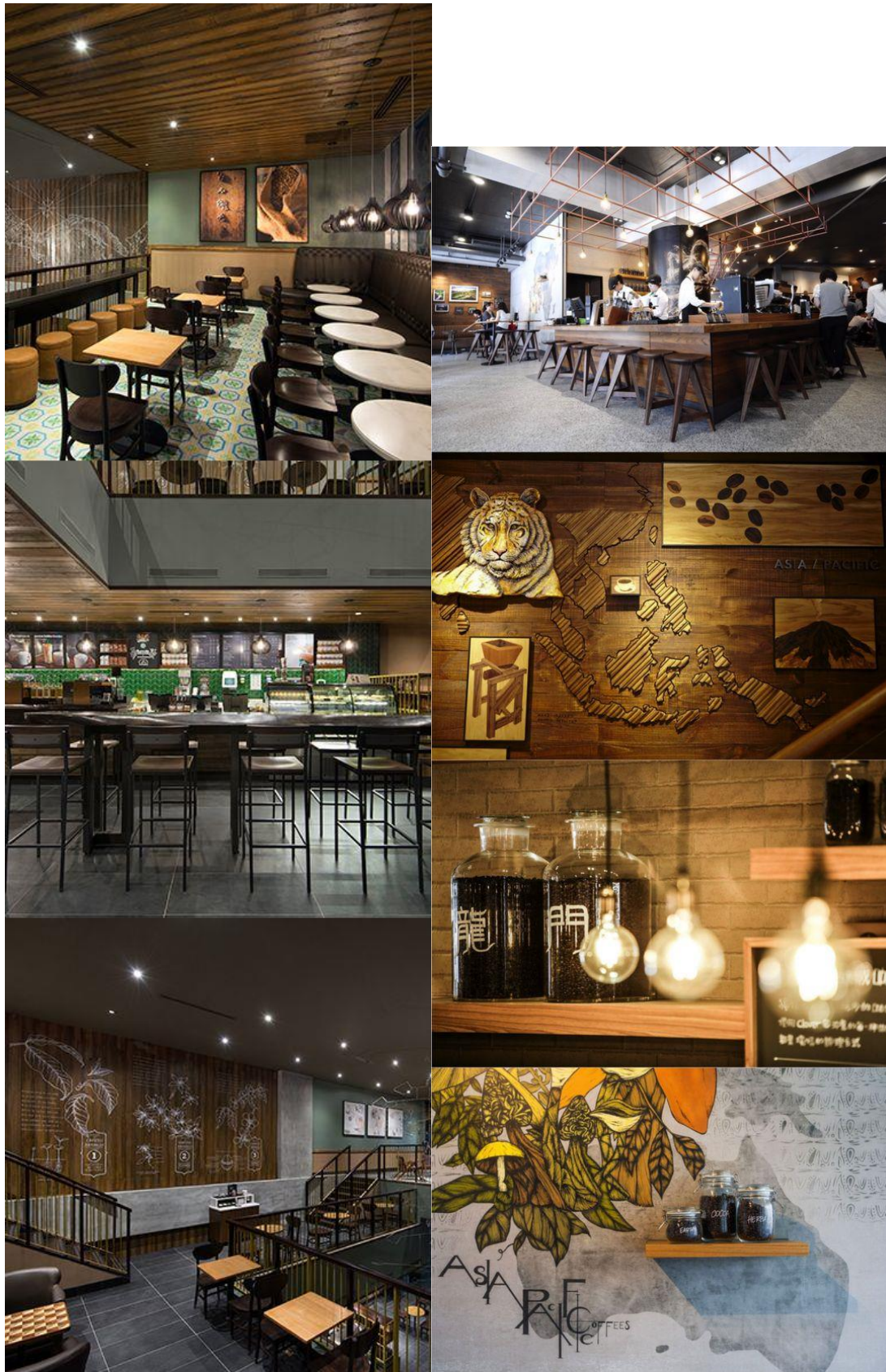


Figure 6: Starbucks Panama. Source: Pinterest (2018)

Furthermore, the literature review established that teams were paramount within global organisations (Senn & Atanasova, 2011; Marks et al., 2001; Caldwell & Gladstein, 1992; Kirkman et al., 2004; Donnellon, 1993).

However, existing literature does not offer a precise explanation of what constitutes the process that grounds the transition from ‘global’ to ‘local’.

By reviewing the literature, we were able to determine that Starbucks has an in-house design team split into two main categories: ‘The Starbucks Global Design Team’ and the ‘The Store Design Team’. However, it should be noted that outsourcing is also used on some occasions. The Design Council (2007) identified that ‘The Starbucks Global Design Team’ is responsible for the delivery of all in-store collateral and packaging, for the design of much of advertising and marketing materials, and for a visual merchandising group that works on visual presentation in the stores and of the products. A separate store design team is responsible for the design of the furniture, fittings, and the layout of Starbucks’ spaces. However, it did not specify how these different teams relate and the concrete roles they are assigned; therefore, the interviews were conducted in order to understand the teams’ structure, the nature of communications within and across different teams, as well as the outsourcing model.

Moreover, secondary sources established that Starbucks still has some new stores opening that are standardised; therefore, identifying the strategy behind selecting which stores to localise was also a goal of the interviews.

Consequently, the interviews were designed to explore and capture the methods that the teams use regularly and also specifically when transposing the brand to local environments. They also included the need to understand the inspiration for localised designs and the challenges that the teams face in order to design tools to address those challenges.

The information explored in the literature review section was then used to formulate the questions for the purpose of data collection. The questions were designed to capture information including: (1) understanding the basics of its general practice, (2) understanding the process of localising in more detail, (3) understanding the teams, (4) discussing specific examples of projects and shops worldwide, and (5) seeking solutions to challenges faced.

Primary Data Collection – The Study of the Case of Starbucks

Interviews

We used primary data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, the research method we chose in this study was mainly based on a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews are commonly applied in qualitative research (Kitchin & Tate, 2000) and also feature prominently within design research (Michlewski, 2008; Gary, 2014; Roise et al., 2014). Within this study, four semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Table 1: Participants’ Information

| <i>Participant Code</i> | <i>Job Title</i> | <i>Interview Duration</i> | <i>Medium</i> |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Store Designer A | Senior Designer – International Store Design & Concepts at Starbucks EMEA | 1:03:02 | Video Conferencing |
| Store Designer B | Interior Project Designer at Starbucks EMEA | 27:58 | Video Conferencing |
| Designer Manager | Design Manager at Starbucks EMEA | 51:30 | Video Conferencing |
| Store Designer C | Store Designer at Starbucks, Miami, U.S. | 37:28 | Face to Face |

Question included:

- What does your work involve on a more or less everyday basis?
- What is a typical project?
- Describe a typical project structure of a team.
- What are your roles and responsibilities in the context of a wider brand team?

- How do you facilitate the transition ‘from global to local’?
- Which store in your opinion is very successful and why?
- What does successfully representing global identities to local territories mean in relation to these particular examples?
- What are the main challenges that you are facing in terms of the things that we discussed, such as context vs. brand? What type of support do you need?
- What tools would be useful to you to address the issues of localising design in your practice?

Additional questions were available for lapses in conversation, or in cases wherein the participant failed to address the aspects needed to answer the research question. These supplementary prompts were used in order to encourage or guide participants towards the information required. These questions include the following:

- Which part of the work is systemised and which is manual?
- There are still some Starbucks shops that are standardised. Why is that?

Data Analysis

The analysis followed several steps according to the guidelines of case study and qualitative data analysis methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the qualitative data collected during the interviews. To ensure reliability, this method must be conducted systematically. Transcribing and coding can be very flexible and conducted on every sentence, word or paragraph, depending on the need, followed by an examination of the codes and their relationships with each other, and eventually revealing overarching themes. Then, an initial list of the main themes, construct and insights was completed. The list was further refined when compared with relationships found in the literature, in order to identify similarities and differences, increase the internal validity of results, and refine recurring themes and constructs. The iteration between data, literature and analysis was repeated several times. The results of this iterative process are presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Thematic analysis was adopted because of its flexibility — not simply in terms of theory, but also in terms of the research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The main aim of the questions was to understand how Starbucks manages consistency and local relevancy. However, in order to extract the information sought, some general information about Starbucks was needed in order to understand the context in which local relevancy is achieved. Therefore, the findings begin by first outlining the general information such as ‘Team Structure’, ‘Available Tools’, ‘Spatial Restrictions’ and ‘Strategy’. Later ‘Local Relevancy’ is explained, and various issues are addressed, including the challenge of local relevancy according to the store design team, where the team finds inspiration to tackle the issues, and the method they use to do so. Finally, the questions broach the topic of new tools that can help tackle these issues.

a. Team Structure and Method

This theme encapsulates the structure of the store design team at Starbucks and the way in which it communicates with the other teams. The interviewees were selected from two different Starbucks offices. Three of the participants were based in the Amsterdam office and responsible for the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) markets, while one of the participants was based in the Miami, Florida office and responsible for the South East America, Florida and Latin America markets.

The interviews established the fact that the EMEA market is split into two offices: one in Amsterdam and one in London. The London office is responsible for the U.K. stores and a small portion of Europe, while the Amsterdam offices are responsible for the rest of the stores in that market.

The store design teams are split based on the licensee, and vary from two to five members, depending on the size of that market. The teams are always composed of one designer manager and varying levels of designers with a 3D degree background. One participant mentioned:

“We in Amsterdam are covering what we call the GEO licensee market and that means that we have divided Europe in different areas related a licence store. For example, the Middle East, Turkey and Russia are covered by once licensee; they are quite a big company and they are operating the Starbucks stores in that area. Then we have a few teams, as they are really large; we have a few smaller teams that are developing new stores with that local licence, so the large design pool of people are divided in separate smaller teams. They vary from small teams are two persons and bigger teams are four to five persons and each team has a design manager and at least one project designer.” – Design Manager

Graphic designers were previously part of the store design team; however, they are now part of the concept team. Therefore, for artwork needs, the store designers use a program called the Starbucks art program. The design manager within the store design team is responsible for maintaining the relationship between the licensee and the internal team. The store design team takes care of not only creating the layouts, but also ensuring that the brand is expressed properly by the design and implemented in the right way. The design is rarely outsourced, but for very high-profile cases, this is sometimes used. For smaller design elements, outsourcing is also possible, but rare. The store design team in Amsterdam work with the operations, marketing, and real estate departments and with local construction teams. In the EMEA Starbucks office, the store designers speak to the operations and real estate teams on a weekly basis. Within the store design team, there are weekly meetings per market. Therein, the different teams meet to talk about the challenges faced, so it is important for the design team to present their project in order to receive feedback from the market. Meanwhile, the store design team itself holds a daily meeting at an assigned time.

The operations team are responsible for regularly evaluating the store’s efficiency and devising the templates and manuals.

In the U.S. office, the teams are usually composed of a project manager and a designer, and rarely comprise more than two members.

The design team begins by receiving the brief through a digital system. They view the brief and if there are any questions, they clarify those with the relevant department, usually operations or real estate. Then they start by understanding the customer and the needs of that specific store, followed by the creation of the preliminary layout, schematic layout, and packages — this is the stage wherein the drawings become increasingly more detailed. Then it goes to the market, operations team and market team. Once it has been approved, it either goes to a local firm to translate the drawings (if mandated by the laws of the country) or straight to construction. If the construction team has an issue, they contact the manager to resolve the problem.

b. Available Tools

It was paramount to understanding the tools that the store design team use in a leading global brand such as Starbucks. These tools include the following:

Briefs for new and renovation projects database: Project requests from the market are represented to the designers on a sheet which lists all stores that are yet to be completed, including new projects and renovations. The store designers receive a project request containing details such as a number, project rules along with tick boxes, and a survey package. If there is an issue, the store designer can flag the project to be discussed with the related department.

Fixed items template: A template for the focal point of the Starbucks stores (which is the bar) is available for designers. It includes information such as the amount of equipment and the spaces between items, with some variations depending on countries. The material finishes, artwork, and seating arrangements are subject to change from store to store. Furthermore, the back of house is fixed with a template and guidelines. The operations team are responsible for regularly evaluating the store’s efficiency and devising the templates and manuals.

Brief calculations: With each brief handed to designers, the real estate team has already calculated the number of people who can be accommodated by the store in order for the store to generate money. This covers how much space should be allocated to each function, depending on the chosen site.

Starbucks Art Program: The U.S. office develops pieces for the store designers to use. This is renovated constantly and varies from area to area.

Software: A furniture and materials library that includes 3D models of the catalogue items. The test results on a specific piece of furniture can be viewed, with the test having been carried out in the main office in the U.S.

Report: A report from the market addressing the local demographics and preferences of that specific area.

Database: This includes marketing guidelines, correct logo usage guidelines, brand wording, etc.

c. Spatial Restrictions

In terms of spatial challenges, budget constraints typically limit the type of furniture and finishes the designer can select, while attempting to satisfy the brief in terms of managing spatial restrictions, such as providing the amount of seating needed to make revenue, as well as ensuring that the emergency exits remain clearly marked, while also keeping the budget in mind. As a Starbucks store designer remarked:

“The challenges are not only bringing the identity of the brand into the café, it is also having the number of seating that the company requires to make that much money per year; sometimes it is impossible because you need to keep in mind fire exits, and some states have different rules: some states the require two exits, sometimes one exit. We receive many transfers from one Starbucks to XXX [another brand]. They left and we are taking over, so there is no plumbing. You start from zero from scratch and you have to minimise the cost. I cannot get my construction team to do plumbing wherever I want — that is cost — so sometimes I should keep the flooring; we are not changing it, so those small changes, the do’s and don’ts, are what make things difficult.” – Store Designer C



d. Strategy

Figure 7: Starbucks Store Hierarchy. Source: Forbes (2016)

The literature showed that Starbucks still has stores that are somewhat more standardised than others. The interviews explained the strategy visualised in Figure 4. At the top of the pyramid are the premium Starbucks stores; the core stores sit below, and become less and less premium towards the bottom. The most premium stores offer the maximum look, feel and experience of the brand. The budget decreases based on the store’s position within the pyramid. Thus far, the Starbucks strategy is to localise all locations, but to pay closer attention to the highest-placed stores in terms of delivering the maximum experience of the brand.

d. Local relevancy:

1. Challenge

It is a challenge to create designs that people can claim more or less as their own, designed by a foreign designer. Moreover, creating works that are not cliché is a particular feat.

Staying relevant is also a challenge in a competitive market space, especially since online stores came to be; therefore, stores rely on experiences, but since many stores rely on that method to compete, there needs to be a differentiating factor to attract people to this specific experience. Participants mentioned:

“I mean, we do what we can, but it is a challenge working for the world and making stuff that people can claim more so their own. It is a big challenge honestly. Some people like it more than others.” – Store Design A

“The difficulty there, you need to be sure that you are doing the right thing and you are not creating a cliché that everybody is living in this area already knows, so you can go wrong there as well.” – Design Manager

2. Inspiration

Currently, the company supplies the store designers with a report on the local demographics and market preferences. This is given to the store designers along with the brief, and serves as part of the inspiration which the designers work from in order to develop a localised shop. After the design has been developed, it is also presented to the market and feedback is offered in order to resolve any issue that arose. As designers mentioned:

“I would say the majority will arrive through the knowledge of the market itself. It kind of teaches us and guides us and, of course, the rest is common sense. It is what we know; it is the sensibility that we have, but the majority is the market itself.” –Store Designer B

Visiting the relevant country is often a good way of becoming acquainted with the culture, but this is not always possible. As a design manager at Starbucks mentioned:

“For example, if we travel and that is always a big budget issue we cannot endlessly travel; and especially the project designers, they cannot endlessly travel. Then that is something that even limited, but we always try to do, for example, is bring a few products that are locally relevant and they can be things to eat, coffee that is not from Starbucks but another brand, local tea, even some other products.” – Design Manager

To understand the people with whom they are working, store designers take the initiative to research real books, watch films and test local products that are brought by company personnel who could travel in order to understand the culture. As mentioned above in the previous example, a designer also commented:

“It is not asked for us but we take initiative on, let’s say, research and books. We watch films; we would do anything just to absorb and to actually understand who are the people we are working with, but there is no (to me), there is not a clear blueprint on how to do that, so this is (to me) something that you need to do on your own, and (to me) I take that really seriously, because if we are actually talking about being locally relevant the best would be is that we immerse ourselves in that culture.” – Store Designer A

Travelling to the country in which the store is being designed is a way of gaining inspiration and understanding the culture; however, for a number of reasons, including budget and timeline issues, the designers typically can’t spend a month or two in that country, and junior designers sometimes do not visit at all. The store designers try to work closely with the local team in the country, especially if they are not able to travel themselves, a situation which also presents its own challenges. These include inaccurate information or linguistic or cultural barriers. Miscommunication with local contractors can lead to difficulty in assessing whether the design has been executed in the way intended. As a participant mentioned:

“So we try to do as much as we can and also to work closely with our guys on the ground. Look, I have seen this, I have seen that. We see some feedback from people when we say this. We also discuss with operations. Normally they give us feedback on things and the problem with that is we would expect a bit of quality, or much more insight from our partners but we don’t always get that.” – Store Designer A

3. Method

There is no rulebook on how to be locally relevant — the inspiration and work are quite organic. However, there are certain core values against which every design is judged. Those values can easily be translated into different locations around the world. The first is human connection, followed by warmth and honesty. Connecting people over coffee can be translated into different seating arrangements, depending on the country. Meanwhile, warmth can be translated by the use of certain colours and materials. Honesty translates by paying farmers and artists in an honest way, and in terms of space, selecting real, honest materials.

e. The Need for New Tools

The interviews with the participants from the Starbucks store design teams verified the need for the tools being developed. It was key to determine the importance of developing such tools and to confirm that they are being targeted towards the right audience. The following statements by the participants confirmed the need for such materials.

When asked if the team would be interested in the tools developed, one of the designers replied:

“Oh, yeah, I think they would be interested to hear on the learning on that... absolutely! I think it would be useful, really useful, especially for Starbucks and other brands. I think a lot of brands would. This is also my perception from some of the things I have learned there. It is like a lot of the brands would like to hear about that because for them it is a major challenge staying relevant.” – Store Designer A

Another participant stated: “I think that it could be really interesting to have a platform that goes a bit deeper into a local culture and giving an image for an outsider of what is really important for a specific area.” – Design Manager

Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategy used to strike the harmony between consistency and local experience involves a combination of aspects, some of which are management’s responsibilities, while others fall into the domain of the designers.

Starbucks store images available in the literature allowed us to see the end results of localised spatial experience as produced by the Starbucks teams’ process. Subsequently, the interviews showed the method and tools the teams use to create localised Starbucks experiences. The interviews also confirmed the need for teamwork and communication, as previously discussed by Senn and Atanasova (2011), Marks et al. (2001), Caldwell and Gladstein (1992), Kirkman et al. (2004) and Donnellon (1993).

To conclude, the Starbucks case study shows that the method of imposing restrictions on functional elements is a necessity; however, having more flexible values when it comes to design is preferable. Instead of equalising the values reflected in colours and fixed materials, the use of more flexible words that can then be translated by designers into what they mean in different cultures helps to create a distinctive experience that people can claim as their own, while still remaining connected to the larger global brand.

The aim of this paper was address how a global leading brand such as Starbucks addresses the pressures of globalisation internally. Literature and observation easily establish that Starbucks localises spaces, but the process the design teams follow to arrive at such outcomes was previously unknown.

Semi-structured interviews revealed that the Starbucks team, even without visiting the relevant country, had to design a customised spatial experience that a local customer would enjoy, while still keeping some consistency. Where possible, travel facilitated this process; however, even a visit of a few days does is often not enough to deeply understand the local people’s perspectives. That is where tools come in handy, as these help the teams ensure that multi-disciplinary perspectives are taken into account to produce a holistic vision.

This suggests that tools are powerful enough to aid local knowledge, even when the designers have to design for local audiences remotely. Further research and improvement of these tools could save global brands travel budgets, as well as relieve the need to install a large local team in every part of the world.

The interviews also confirmed the need for assistance when it comes to this issue, as all interviewees agreed that locality is a frequent challenge of spatial design.

Further Research and Implications

This paper contributes to the wider research topic of investigating the connections between brand management and experience design under the pressures of globalisation. The aim of the research is (a) to explore how brand managers and experience designers on global teams relate to local identities that influence them, and (b) to develop a set of tools that those teams can use when creating local identities in specific sites, in the face of globalisation.

In order to achieve the objectives of the wider research topic, a number of methods could apply. This paper presents findings from part of the approach adopted in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the larger research topic.

The findings will be combined with additional methods so as to create tools that can aid practitioners in transposing global brands into local environments. Further research on other global brands is an important step in understanding the similarities and differences across organisations. That knowledge will help us develop tools with which to tackle the challenges that global brand teams face as a result of globalisation. Understanding the methods and tools employed by one of the most successful global brands ensures the future development of appropriate tools.

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